SUICIDE SQUAD
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SUICIDE SQUAD:
THE PHOENIX GAMBIT
PART 3 OF 4
CONGRATULATIONS, COMRADE! THEY'RE ALL YOURS!
SELL-OUT!
ISHERWOOD '90

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<STOOGES! LICK-SPITTLE FLUNKEYS! YOU OBEY THE ORDERS OF A TYRANT!>
<WE REMEMBER! THE DREAM OF FREEDOM--WE REMEMBER! 50 YEARS, 500 YEARS--WE REMEMBER!>
<YOU SEE WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN, COMRADE ZASTROW!>

<YOUR REFUSAL TO AUTHORIZE MY USE OF THE RED SHADOWS HAS FORCED ME TO MAKE THIS DECISION!>
<THE RED SHADOWS WERE FORMED TO DEAL WITH META-HUMANS, NOT CIVILIAN UPRISINGS.>
<KALIGARI--NO! KALIGARI--GO!>
<THIS IS AN INTERNAL PROBLEM, COMRADE KALIGARI, AND AS SUCH, NOT SPECIFICALLY COVERED IN MY ORDERS.>
<DEAL WITH IT YOURSELF!>
<I SHALL. THE WAY I HAVE ALWAYS HANDLED THESE MATTERS.>
<OPEN FIRE!>
<OPEN FIRE! SHOOT TO KILL!>
3

BADOW!
BADOW!
BADOW!
BADOW!
<THERE, COMRADE ZASTROW. THAT IS HOW YOU DEAL WITH DISSENT.>
4

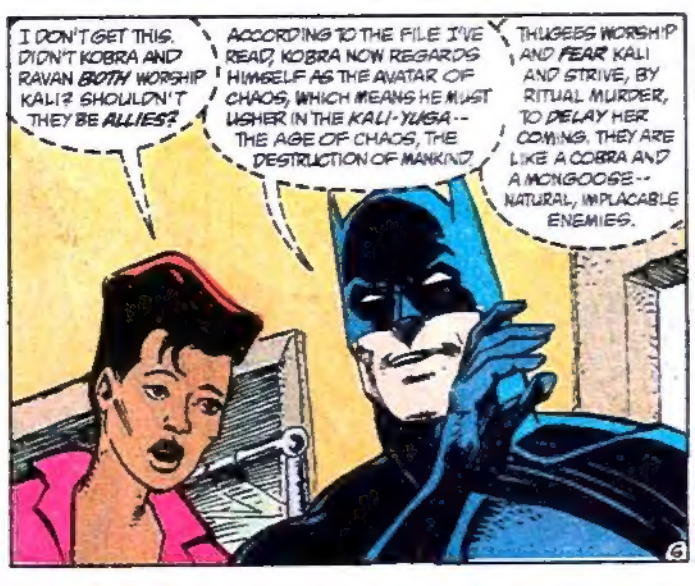
PARIS. EIGHT HOURS LATER...
NOW THIS IS WHAT I CALL CIVILIZATION!
NO BLOODY PALM TREES. NO BLOODY SAND WHAT HIDES BIND! THORNS TO STEP ON. NO MORE BLEEDIN' TROPICAL BIRDS BOMBIN' YOU DAY AND NIGHT. BACK TO WINE, WOMEN AND CRIME, EH? BEAUTY!
<REPORTS ARE SPORADIC, BUT COMMUNIQUÉS INDICATE VIOLENCE IS ESCALATING IN VLATAVA.>
MY, MY. BET YOU BRIGHTENED THE DAY FOR THE BOYS AT CUSTOMS WITH THIS.
DIDN'T COME THROUGH ORLY.
I USED THE JLI TRANSPORTER INSTEAD. MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES.
BY THE BLOOD OF KALI, YOU GO TOO FAR!
6

MY TEMPLE DESTROYED, MY FOLLOWERS SCATTERED, MY WORK INTERRUPTED! BY WHAT RIGHT DO YOU LAY HANDS ON ME?

NEED.
THAT AND A PIECE OF INFORMATION YOU'LL BE MIGHTY INTERESTED IN, RAVAN.
KOBRA'S ALIVE.

YOU LIE! HE PERISHED IN BATTLE WITH THE MAN CALLED CAPTAIN ATOM.
SO HE WANTS EVERYONE TO THINK.

I HAD THE GOVERNMENT RUN AN AUTOPSY ON THAT BODY. IT WASN'T KOBRA'S. THE DEATH WAS FAKED.


I DON'T GET THIS. DIDN'T KOBRA AND RAVAN BOTH WORSHIP KALI? SHOULDN'T THEY BE ALLIES?
ACCORDING TO THE FILE I'VE READ, KOBRA NOW REGARDS HIMSELF AS THE AVATAR OF CHAOS, WHICH MEANS HE MUST USHER IN THE KALI-YUGA -- THE AGE OF CHAOS, THE DESTRUCTION OF MANKIND.
THUGEES WORSHIP AND FEAR KALI AND STRIVE, BY RITUAL MURDER, TO DELAY HER COMING. THEY ARE LIKE A COBRA AND A MONGOOSE -- NATURAL, IMPLACABLE ENEMIES.

IT WAS NOT CAPTAIN ATOM'S DHARMA TO SLAY KOBRA. THAT IS MY DESTINY -- WHICH I SHALL FULFILL NOW.

NO ONE KNOWS WHERE KOBRA IS. WHEN HE RESURFACES, THE SQUAD'S GOT DIBS ON HIS NAGA-HIDE. IN THE MEANTIME, YOU MIGHT CONSIDER THROWING IN YOUR LOT WITH US.

I WOULD BE MOST HAPPY TO. WORKING WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION GIVES ME EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES TO WORSHIP KALI!

YOU HAVE YOUR TEAM. TIME TO START THE NEXT PHASE OF THE PLAN AND COMPLETE OUR ASSIGNMENTS.
AS PER OUR AGREEMENT, YOU GET TO SMOKE OUT THE PEOPLE BEHIND ALL THIS. AND IT'S GOT TO BE DONE IN THE NEXT THIRTY-SIX HOURS. CAN YOU HANDLE IT?

BE SERIOUS.
JUST REMEMBER. I WANT THIS STALNOVOLK DELIVERED STATESIDE FOR THE MURDER OF VLADEK.
IF HUMANLY POSSIBLE, WE'LL DO IT.

BY THE WAY, JUST HOW ARE YOU PLANNING TO GET GORT?

THAT ASSIGNMENT GOES TO BEN.

ABSURD! STALNOIVOLK CAN CRUSH STONE IN HIS HANDS. TEFLON COATED BULLETS DIDN'T PENETRATE HIS SKIN. AND I'VE SEEN HIM JUMP ALMOST A QUARTER MILE FROM A STANDING START.
TURNER'S GOOD, BUT HE'S NOT IN THE SAME LEAGUE.
BEN, YOU THINK YOU CAN HURT A MAN WHO CAN'T BE HURT?

I CAN HURT HIM.

THERE'S YOUR ANSWER.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED TO TURNER-- BUT THAT'S NOT A HEALTHY MAN THERE.
DO I HEAR THE POT CALLING THE KETTLE SOMETHING?

WHAT I WANTS TA KNOW IS--WHO'S ROBBIN' THIS COACH, EH? WHICH ONE'S TEAM LEADER THIS TIME, WALL? TIGER OR FRUITBAT?

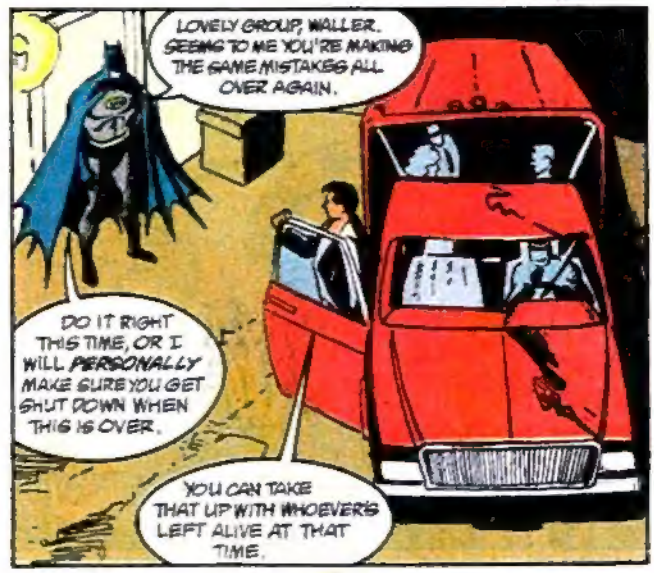
I AM.

I'M GOING TO BE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY THIS TIME.
WON'T NEED ANY BRACELET. YOU MOOK UP NOW AND YOU GOT ME ON TOP OF YOU, MAKING YOUR LIFE MISERABLE--AND YOU KNOW I CAN.

YOU HAVE A SPECIAL PART TO PLAY, DOWN UNDER. ONE I AM SURE YOU WILL ENJOY.

I'M BEGINNIN' TO THINK I SHOULDA STUCK ON TH' BLEEDIN' ISLAND.
OKAY, PEOPLE, LET'S GO.

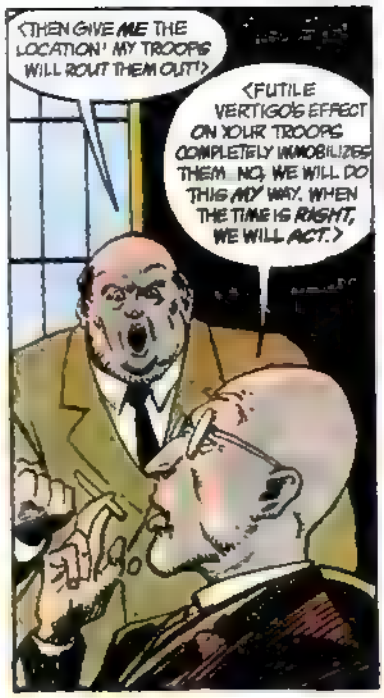
BEN, GO START THE VAN--YOU DRIVE. IVY, THEY GUILLOTINE SHOPLIFTERS IN PARIS--PUT THE DRESSES BACK. MOVE YOUR BUTT, DOWN UNDER--WE GOT A PLANE TO CATCH.


LOVELY GROUP, WALLER. SEEMS TO ME YOU'RE MAKING THE SAME MISTAKES ALL OVER AGAIN.
DO IT RIGHT THIS TIME, OR I WILL PERSONALLY MAKE SURE YOU GET SHUT DOWN WHEN THIS IS OVER.
YOU CAN TAKE THAT UP WITH WHOEVER'S LEFT ALIVE AT THAT TIME.

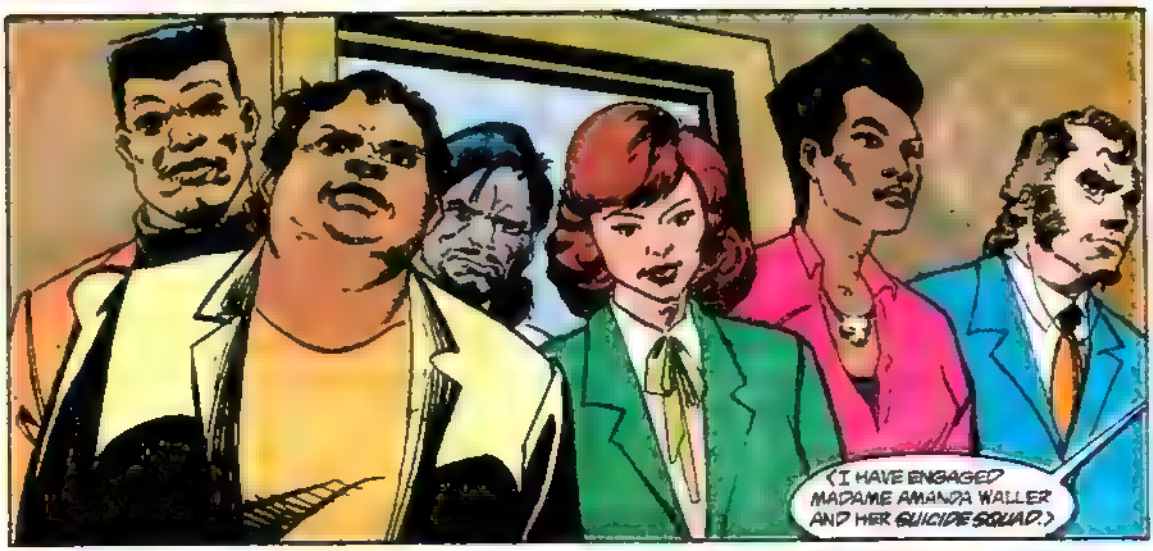
I INTEND TO.

PLEASE FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS--THE CAPTAIN HAS BEGUN HIS FINAL APPROACH AND WE WILL BE LANDING IN VLATAVA IN 15 MINUTES.
NOW, YOU ALL PLAY THIS LIKE I TOLD YOU OR WE'RE HISTORY BEFORE WE EVEN START.
YOU WILL ALL SURRENDER PASSPORTS AND COME WITH US.
10

<YOUR BLUE TRINITY HAS SUPER SPEED! SURELY THEY CAN FIND VERTIGO AND HIS MEN!>
<THE CAMP IS MOVED ON A DAILY BASIS. ASSUMING VERTIGO IS STILL ACTIVE, IT WOULD DO NO GOOD TO HAVE THEM CHARGE IT. WE SAW WHAT HAPPENED LAST TIME. WE KNOW WHERE THE CAMP IS WITHIN A GENERAL PARAMETER.>


<THEN GIVE ME THE LOCATION! MY TROOPS WILL ROUT THEM OUT!>
<FUTILE. VERTIGO'S EFFECT ON YOUR TROOPS COMPLETELY IMMOBILIZES THEM. NO. WE WILL DO THIS MY WAY. WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, WE WILL ACT.>

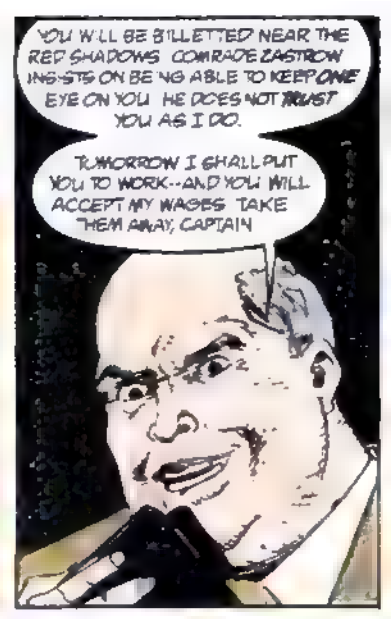
<I AM TIRED OF WAITING ON YOU AND YOUR RED SHADOWS, COMRADE ZASTROW. SINCE YOU WON'T LET ME USE YOUR META-HUMANS, I'VE TAKEN PAINS TO GET SOME OF MY OWN.>
KNOCK
<ENTER!>

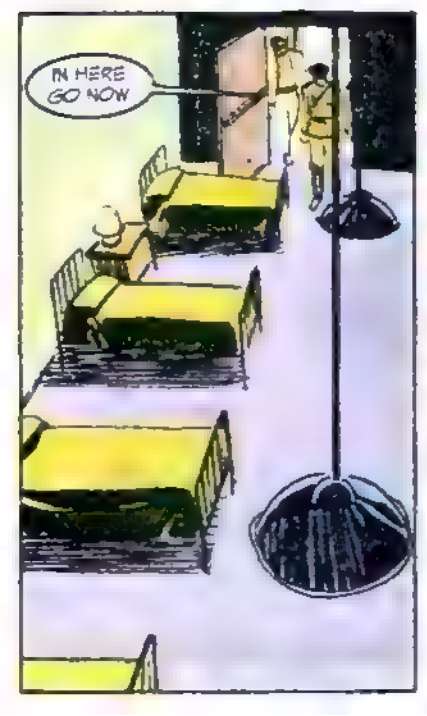

<I HAVE ENGAGED MADAME AMANDA WALLER AND HER SUICIDE SQUAD.>

<MADAME WALLER, EXCELLENCY. THEIR PASSPORTS.>
EXCELLENT. WELCOME, MRS. WALLER. I THINK YOU KNOW OF COMRADE ZASTROW.
PLEASE SIT DOWN. WE HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS.

(MOSCOW WILL NOT BE PLEASED WITH THIS, COMRADE KALIGARI...!)
(I AM NOT PLEASED WITH HOW MOSCOW HAS HANDLED THINGS THUS FAR.)
(WHEN MADAME WALLER CONTACTED ME AND INFORMED ME OF HER NEW FREELANCE GROUP OF OPERATIVES, I DECIDED TO HIRE THEM AND GET THE JOB DONE WHICH YOU REFUSE TO DO, COMRADE ZASTROW.)
(I HAVE NO INTENTION OF CO-OPERATING WITH WALLER--I REGARD THIS AS AN ENORMOUS MISTAKE. GOOD-DAY, COMRADE KALIGARI!)
LET US BRIEFLY REVIEW OUR AGREEMENT. ACCORDING TO YOUR MESSAGE, YOU AND YOUR SQUAD HAVE GONE FREELANCE ON AN INTERNATIONAL SCALE, YES?
WORKING FOR THE UNITED STATES GOT ME A CELL IN BELLE REVE. I FIGURE I CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT ON THE OPEN MARKET.
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF YOUR PROBLEM FOR A MILLION DOLLARS, IN WEST GERMAN CURRENCY. THAT'S OUR USUAL FEE. YOU'LL GET A DISCOUNT--WE'RE TRYING TO GET ESTABLISHED.
A LARGE DISCOUNT IN MY CASE, YOU SEE. I HAVE YOUR PASSPORTS.
UNTIL YOU AND YOUR TEAM PERFORM ACCORDING TO MY SPECIFICATIONS YOU WILL NOT GET THEM BACK WITHOUT THEM. OF COURSE YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO LEAVE VLATAVA.
12

YOU JUST GOING TO TAKE THIS GUFF FROM HIM?
HANDS OFF, YA BLOODY DRONGO!
YOU GOT A BETTER IDEA, TURNER? BEST WE CAN DO RIGHT NOW IS PLAY THIS BY EAR, SO CHILL YOUR TEMPER DOWN TO ABSOLUTE ZERO!


YOU WILL BE BILLETTED NEAR THE RED SHADOWS. COMRADE ZASTROW INSISTS ON BEING ABLE TO KEEP ONE EYE ON YOU. HE DOES NOT TRUST YOU AS I DO.
TOMORROW I SHALL PUT YOU TO WORK--AND YOU WILL ACCEPT MY WAGES. TAKE THEM AWAY, CAPTAIN.


IN HERE GO NOW

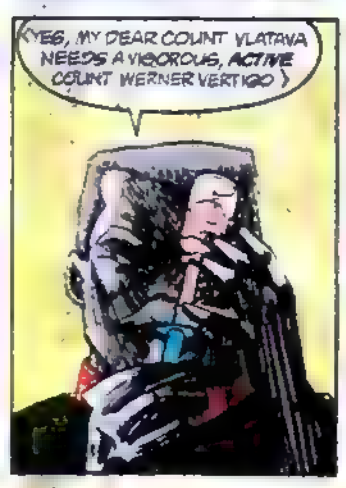
SNAP!
WELL, THIS IS A FINE START, YOU FAT TUB OF SUET!
WHAT HAVE YOU GOTTEN US INTO THIS TIME, WOMAN?

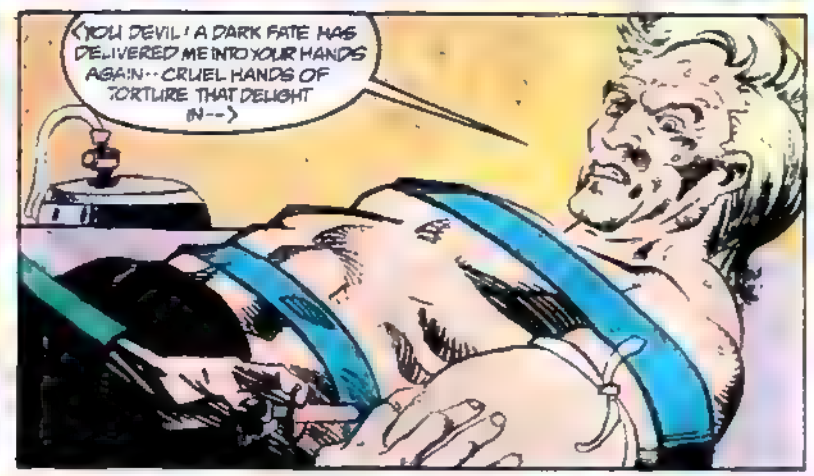
YOU'VE PLAYED US RIGHT INTO KALIGARI'S HANDS.
AND PUT US UNDER HIS THUMB.
CAN'T MAKE A BLEEDIN' MOVE WITHOUT HIS KNOWIN' IT!
YOU PUT US IN A POSITION OF HAVING TO DO WHAT HE COMMANDS.
THEN DO IT AND SHUT UP. NOW, LISTEN, POOLE...
TEK!
ALL RIGHT. THE MIKES THAT HAVEN'T BEEN DISABLED ARE FEEDING ANY AND ALL EAVES-DROPPERS OUR PRE-RECORDED PAP. THEY'LL THINK WE'LL BE HITTING THE HAY SOON.
DOES KALIGARI REALLY BELIEVE WE NEED THOSE PASSPORTS TO GET OUT OF THIS COUNTRY? BETWEEN US, I CAN SEE A HALF-DOZEN WAYS IN AND OUT!
THAT'S THE GAME, GIRL. PRETEND TO PLAY INTO THEIR HANDS SO THEY DON'T SEE HOW THEY'RE PLAYING INTO YOURS.
BY THE WAY-- "FAT TUB OF SUET"?
EY! HAD TO MAKE IT SOUND THE PAR DIN KUM, RIGHT?

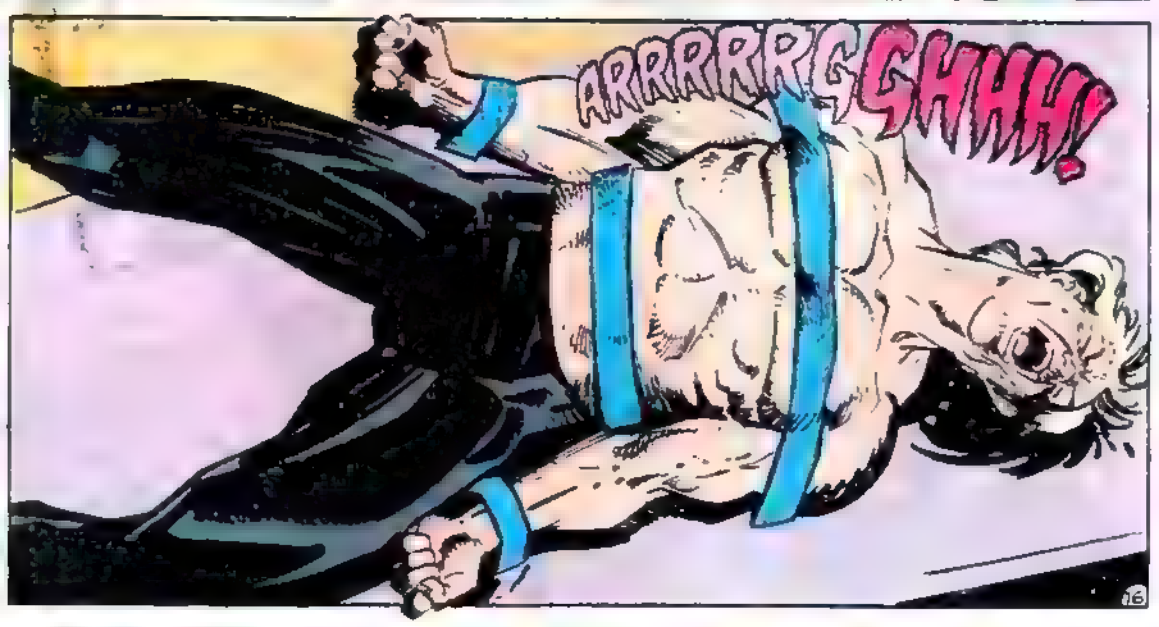
ALL RIGHT SO FAR IT'S ALL ACCORDING TO PLAN. YOU GOT YOUR ASSIGNMENTS. GET MOVING-- WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME AND THERE'S LOTS TO DO.
REMEMBER--STICK TO THE PLAN AND ACT AS A TEAM LIKE YOU BEEN DOING. OVERPLAY YOUR HAND AND KALIBAR! WILL CHOP IT OFF ZASTROW WILL JUST GO FOR THE JUGULAR
COUNT VERTIGO'S CAMP.
<PHYSICALLY, THE COUNT IS MUCH IMPROVED SINCE THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE RUSSIAN META-HUMAN AGENT MOLOTOV, COLONEL KAPEK>
<MENTALLY--HE IS STILL IN THE DEPRESSIVE PHASE OF HIS CYCLE, I'M AFRAID.>
<MUCH GOOD THAT DOES US, HEINRICH! OUR AMERICAN PATRON IS IMPATIENT--HE WANTS VERTIGO AND HIS POWER BACK IN THE FIELD!>
<VERTIGO WAS VERY DISTRESSED ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO HELP THE CIVILIAN DEMONSTRATORS.>
<THE DEVIL TAKE THE DEMONSTRATORS! THE PATRON DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT THEM AND NEITHER DO I! GET VERTIGO ON HIS FEET AGAIN!>
<YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO, HEINRICH.>
<AND YOU KNOW THIS IS TURNING HIM INTO AN ADDICT!>
<HE'S DIFFICULT TO MANAGE AS IS, I SHUDDER TO THINK WHAT HE'D BE LIKE WITH A DRUG HABIT!>
<THAT IS NEITHER YOUR CONCERN NOR MINE! THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT VERTIGO WINS-->
<--NO ONE CARES IF HE SURVIVES HIS VICTORY!>
<NOW, BE A GOOD SOLDIER AND OBEY ORDERS!>
15

I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.

YOU WANT ME TO GO CRAZY AGAIN, YES?


YES, MY DEAR COUNT VLATAVA NEEDS A VIGOROUS, ACTIVE COUNT WERNER VERTIGO


YOU DEVIL! A DARK FATE HAS DELIVERED ME INTO YOUR HANDS AGAIN··· CRUEL HANDS OF TORTURE THAT DELIGHT IN--

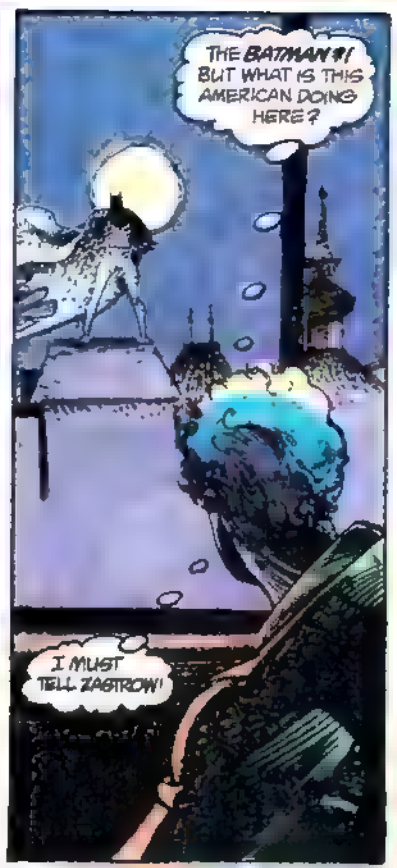

ARRRRRRGGHHH!

RED SHADOWS FIELD HQ, VLATAVA.

WHY DID ZASTROW BOTHER BRINGING *ME*? WHY DOES HE SAY, "*BOLSHOI* COMES, *MOLOTOV* COMES, THE OTHER COMRADE HEROES STAY BEHIND"?

HAMMER AND SICKLE--WELL, WITH STALNOI VOLK, MAYBE YOU DON'T NEED THEM. BUT WHY WOULD ZASTROW NOT WANT PRAVDA'S MIND-READING ABILITIES?

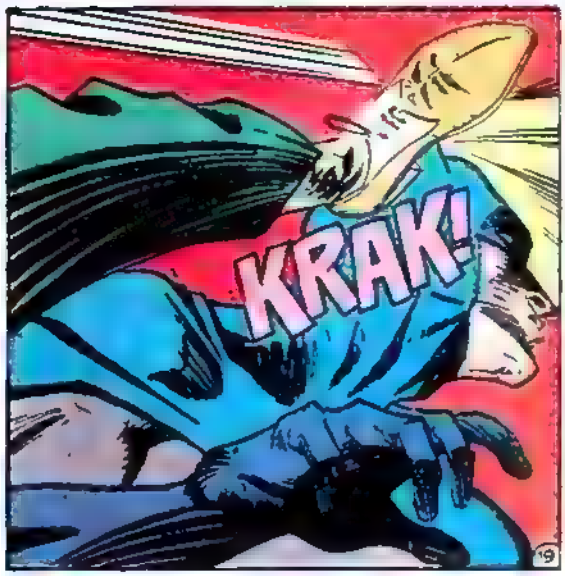
AS A FIGHTER, I AM A MEDIOCRE DANCER--JUST AS A DANCER, I WAS A MEDIOCRE FIGHTER. WHY BRING *ME*?



DAMN!
RRRRING
<YES? WHAT? THE GUARD SAW WHO? BATMAN! AND BOLSHOI?!>

<GET HOLD OF BLUE TRINIT TELL THEM TO REPORT IMMEDIATELY! FIND STALNOIVOLK! HE'S OUT PROWLING THE THIRD QUADRANT! DO IT!>

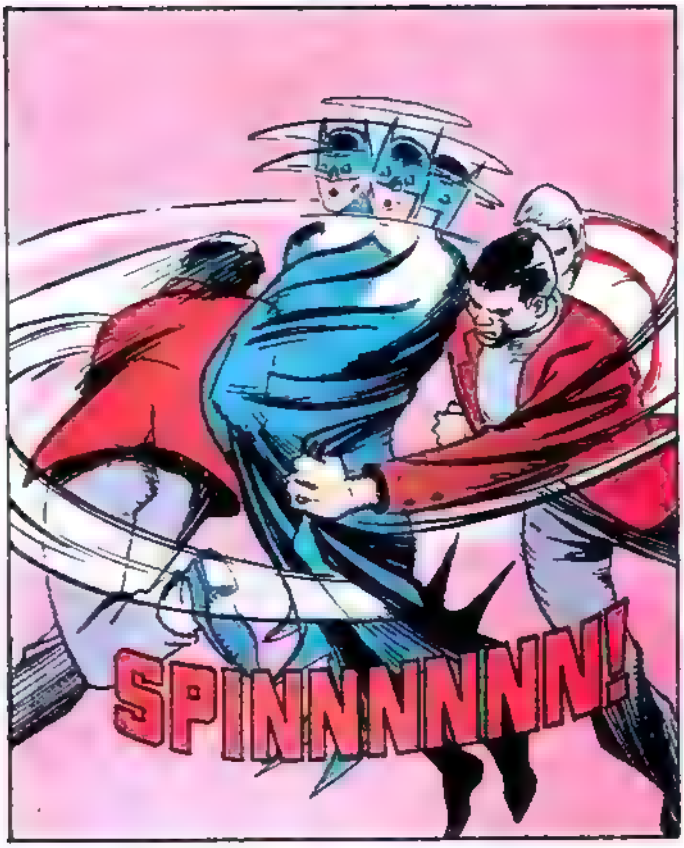
VIXEN TO WALL. TIGER'S PREY LIKELY IN FOLLOW'NG CO-ORD'NATES--RIVER TO WALPURGIS STREET. ALSO SUGGEST VY LEAF THROUGH SECTORS 6 AND 7


KRAK!

BLAM!
HALT, OR WITH NEXT SHOT I AM KILLING YOU.
20

(STOP HIM)

(AG)
(GOOD)
(AG)
(DONE!)


SPINNNNNN!

(CLEAN HIM UP AND BRING HIM TO MY OFFICE)
(ODD I SOMEHOW THOUGHT BATMAN WOULD HAVE A STRONGER STOMACH)
RRRRHALLLLL

NEXT: **ENDGAME**

SUICIDE NOTES

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Yo, Squad-dudes! Are we having fun yet? Yeah, me too. This issue we're going to be reading mail from issues #38 and #39 to make room next month for the zillion letters we got on #40. Here goes...

To the Tellers of the Tiger's Tale,

SUICIDE SQUAD #38 was the issue that, deep down inside, Suicide Squad fans were waiting for, whether they realized it or not. Ben's tale had to be told, to us as well as to Sarge Steel, and it was inevitable that it be one full of violence and passion and pain. If you ask me, Steel coerced Ben into cracking up, or, at the very least, unblocked feelings that Ben himself kept locked deep inside. Amanda's training may have enabled him to keep his anger in check, but all that's undone at the story's end. "Caging the Tiger" was a powerful story, and whatever the outcome next issue, please don't let Ben go the same route as Rick Flag. He and Mari are the main reasons I buy this book! Perhaps the sweeping changes that you're promising for the Squad will have something to do with the Bronze Tiger, so I'll just buckle my seat belt for the bumpy ride ahead...

On a side note, I'd like to thank you for the brief reference to the Batman story involving the Bronze Tiger and Kathy Kane. It's one of my all-time favorites! Also, "Caging the Tiger" is noteworthy because while it brought to light many familiar facts about Ben, there were many that I was learning for the first time. Perhaps this could lead to some appearances with Richard Dragon and/or the Question?

Great subplots this issue! I can't wait for the Squad's clash with the Loa, and Jewelee's pregnancy is an interesting turn of events. That single, tearful panel with Oracle was so eloquent, but, man, was it great to see Barbara Gordon again—wheelchair or no!

I liked the art this issue much better than the last few, probably because Geof Isherwood's finishes blended better with Luke McDonnell's layouts than with John K. Snyder's, in my opinion.

Yours till Amanda goes soft,
Neil Ahlquist
1100 Washington St. NE Apt. #2
Minneapolis, MN 55413

Neil, don't worry about Ben too much. His personal story and his relationship with Amanda and Mari are important subplots in this book, and you'll be seeing more of them over the next few months.

By the way, what did you think of Amanda's solution to the Loa problem? I wouldn't exactly describe it as "soft," would you?

*****

Dear Dan,

"Caging the Tiger"?

The tiger will only be caged if Ben's confrontation with his own anger results in a more stable control of himself, leading him to be a more powerful character, and an asset to the Squad.

But was his self-confrontation enough to bring this about? I hope after a period of adjustment he does return.

Finally, kudos to Bob Greenberger, who signed off this book showing exactly how involved and caring he was with the Squad.

Melissa Page
236 New Salem Loop
Nortonville, KY 42442

Melissa, as you've already seen, Ben's still a major player in SUICIDE SQUAD. Next issue we'll get a glimpse of where his relationship with Mari McCabe/Vixen will be going.

And consider Mr. Greenberger "kudoed." John and Kim sent him some themselves.

*****

Dear Dan,

Whilst it was both entertaining and enlightening to be taken on a guided tour through Ben's life, the most significant events in SUICIDE SQUAD #38 were those foreshadowing what looks like the end of Amanda Waller's reign. The most important image, then, is that previewing the next issue, with the Wall in handcuffs. She's bluffed her way through one attempt to oust her from her position, but what you're saying is that this is the time she loses.

Could this, then, be the moment to give Sarge Steel a more prominent role in the DC Universe? He's one of the Charlton characters who's not had much to do. He certainly has designs on increasing his power base. I'm sure the Squad itself won't be dismantled, yet we know you're dramatically altering its profile—this theme of complete change runs through John's books! At the same time, I can't see you changing the essence of the Squad, that which makes it different from other teams, its combination of being a group to do the government's dirty work, yet one that maintains, through the Wall, a certain amount of independence. Or, just maybe, that's exactly what you want to change. After all, it's these ties to the powers that be that restrict the Squad and its members more than anything. To be, say, a rogue unit that contracts itself out to do work would be one interesting possibility. Another would be to adopt a clearer outlaw status. Whatever, it's all speculation that will be confirmed or denied in the next few months, and I'm sure it will be, if nothing else, absorbing.

Malcolm Bourne
Ramsbottom, Lancashire
England

Absorbed, Malcolm?

*****

Dear Squad-Scribes,

Being home from college for the holidays definitely has its advantages—like having the time to go through your comic book collection rereading some of those great stories of months or years gone by. I just finished reading the Legends limited series which, as all Suicide Squad fans know, contains the first appearances of our favorite band of criminals and outcasts. Legends came out over three years ago, and the Suicide Squad is still going strong.

From cover to cover, issue #38 was just plain excellent. But now you're promising sweeping changes—after three years of what I would call smashing success. People, Suicide Squad is not the X-Men! It will probably never attain the fan status of that mutant soap opera, but the stories are of consistently high quality, and are always unpredictable. In my area the Suicide Squad has a strong following of mature comic book readers, very few eleven- or twelve-year-olds. I just don't feel a major format or direction change will bring you a bevy of new readers. I do believe that if you continue to produce the high-impact material that you have been over the past three years, you cannot help but expand your audience. I guess what I'm trying to

say is that these changes you are alluding to are making me nervous.

Looking at Legends, I never would have guessed that the concept of the Suicide Squad could have been taken so far and handled so well. As for the future, good or bad, you will be hearing from me.

Sincerely,
Scott R. Pyle
IUP
214 Wallace Hall
Indiana, PA 15705

Well, Scott, as you can see, just because we shook the Squad up, it doesn't mean we're turning our backs on what makes this book successful.

Frankly, those of us who have been with this book from #1 as fans or creators already know how good SUICIDE SQUAD is. If a shake-up and a Batman appearance get more people to read the book regularly without compromising the quality, I'll be the happiest boy in playland. So don't be nervous, man!

*****

Dear Good Guys,

John Ostrander has really outdone himself with issue #38. A typical great issue and I have only one minor complaint: Just why is John doing this to all the "good guys" in the Squad? First it was Flag to go, now it's Ben's turn, and I guess Amanda's gonna take the fall next issue. Incidentally, I have heard of "The Phoenix Gambit" and I can only hope that this is all part of John's master plan to rebuild the Squad—speaking of which, I really hope that Oracle will play a bigger role in the new Squad.

Great to see Luke McDonnell's handiwork again. And Maguire's cover was simply one of his best.

By the way, has John Ostrander ever thought of writing a spy thriller? I bet he'd give Frederick Forsyth and Robert Ludlum a real run for their money.

Melvin Yong
5A Lloyd Rd.
Singapore 0923

Hey, if you guys know any spy thriller fans who don't read comics, wait until next month, and sit them down with the entire "Phoenix Gambit." John and Kim have done a masterly job plotting this thing; you might not realize it yet, but the twists and turns don't stop until the last page of the last chapter.

*****

Dear Dan, Bob, and Co.,

Re: SUICIDE SQUAD #38

A few quick observations:

1) I'm not so sure I'd be interested in SARGE STEEL anymore, after reading this issue. Faraday appears to have hit a sore spot on Steel, accusing his boss of being (gulp!) a racist—not directly accusing him, to be sure, but the implication weighs very heavily. Does Steel harbor any sort of jealousy toward Amanda and Ben? I'm afraid to even think about it.

2) Gotta like the Lon. If Freddy Krueger weren't a ghost, he'd probably have gotten hip to this group's methods. Corporate terrorism. Sounds like the hip thing to do for criminal groups in the new decade. Got a solid, sinister ring to it, too.

3) Bank on this: Barbara "Oracle" Gordon will sign up for the *new* Squad before this calendar year is out.

4) Yo, Faraday! Richard Dragon isn't missing anymore! Turned up in the latest QUESTION to become ol' No-Face's new trainer. Look him up, why don't you?

5) I wish I was playing "On The Dark Side" by John Cafferty and the Beaver Brown Band while reading this. Would make great soundtrack music if this were on TV, eh? Ben's lost control and in the process broke Mari's heart. And here I hoped we'd see a wedding this year in here...!

6) Jewelee—pregnant?! HAVE MERCY! When was the last time a career villainess had a baby, if ever? A comics first! Yo, Punch! Time to sign up for Lamaze courses, unless the Wall wants to help (and right now I doubt that very seriously).

7) McDONNELL RULES! With THE PHANTOM about to wave goodbye, how about having Luke as a DP (Designated Penciller) whenever Snyder can't do an issue? (Maguire & Isherwood would be just as great. Check out possibilities for using the cover as a poster!)

Later, dudes.

Jacob Gilbert
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Dear DC,

I read in THE COMIC SHOP NEWS that the Suicide Squad will be disbanded, Amanda Waller put in prison, and then the Squad gets restarted a year later. (Not our time, their time.) SUICIDE SQUAD #38 does nothing to persuade me the report was wrong. Sarge Steel says the Squad must be disbanded forever and the next issue section shows Waller being taken away in handcuffs. These changes should be the latest in ideas the creative team has used to keep this book from getting boring and stale. Maybe they should have done the "Dirty Dozen" TV sequels. (Maybe NO ONE should have done those.)

What I find most interesting about the upcoming changes is that the Squad will apparently end before all the things you've been building up to are resolved, and SS38 continues to add to that with Jewelee's pregnancy. I hope next issue doesn't try to tie up all the loose ends or it could end up being a real mess. It would also be more realistic to leave some things hanging, as that's how it often happens in real life. A situation comes to an abrupt end and leaves things unfinished, and some outcomes unsure.

It would also appear that you have finally admitted that Oracle is Barbara Gordon. That's one loose end wrapped up, except none of the Squad have learned Oracle's identity. Still, you have dropped many hints to the readers on Oracle's identity, and last year's BATMAN Annual told us she was Oracle. This issue, though, raises the question of how Flo's death will affect Barbara, especially considering the advice and friendship they had shared. Will Barbara continue to be Oracle? Whatever her decision, based on the experience with Flo, the Squad is being disbanded and she may not feel a need to serve a different group or person.

Finally, the background on Ben was well done, and an in-depth look at his character. Most, if not all, of it fits in with the "Whatever Happened to Richard Dragon?" story in DC COMICS PRESENTS #39, from 1981, which I coincidentally read just before I got SS38. The only thing missing was Barney Ling. Did CRISIS do away with this? Did Faraday ignore it as unimportant, or because he was unaware of it? And does it matter?

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Stephen, Stephen ... I was hoping I could get through this column without having to mention Barney Ling and his secret agency, G.O.O.D. When I learned that even Denny O'Neil didn't know what the heck G.O.O.D. stood for, I encouraged John and Bob to drop it and ol' Barney from Ben's origin. So, I guess, yeah, they were pre-Crisis. Somehow, during the Crisis, Barney woke up one morning and learned that he never existed in the first place. Funny thing about origin stories...

And a final note to Brock Germain of Beaconsfield, Tasmania: G'day! I hope you're not too upset with the return of Captain Boomerang, a.k.a. Digger Harkness, and his ubiquitous Australian slang. John has been interested in spotlighting Boomerbutt for a while now, and, with Ozzie comics-writer David M. DeVries, has written "Grave Matters," an in-depth look at Captain Boomerang's early years, for SUICIDE SQUAD #44.

AND it's going to be pencilled by Luke McDonnell and inked by Geof Isherwood, and that's fair dinkum, *mate!*

Next issue: the end of "The Phoenix Gambit." Man, I'm not even going to try to summarize this one. I will say that it's really great, and that if you miss it, you'll never forgive yourselves. It's got Amanda and Deadshot, Bronze Tiger and Vixen, Stalnoiwolk and Zastrow, Kaligari and Vertigo, Boomerang and Ravan, and Poison Ivy and Batman.

Say no more.

—Dan Raspler
Editor with a certain little something

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